

Culture consists of shared cognitive representations in the minds of individuals. This paper investigates the extent to which English-speakers share the "same" semantic structure of English kinship terms. The semantic structure is defined as the arrangement of the terms relative to each other as represented in a metric space in which items judged more similar are placed closer to each other than items judged as less similar. The cognitive representation of the semantic structure, residing in the mind of an individual, is measured by judged similarity tasks involving comparisons among terms. Using six independent measurements, from each of 122 individuals, correspondence analysis represents the data in a common multidimensional spatial representation. Judging by a variety of statistical procedures, the individuals in our sample share virtually identical cognitive representations of the semantic structure of kinship terms. This model of culture accounts for 70% to 90% of the total variability in these data. We argue that our findings on kinship should generalize to all semantic domains, e.g., animals, emotions, etc. The investigation of semantic domains is important because they may reside in localized functional units in the brain, because they relate to a variety of cognitive processes, and because they have the potential to provide methods for diagnosing individual breakdowns in the structure of cognitive representations typical of such ailments as Alzheimer's disease.